

INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICS

Philosophy 215
Spring 2019
M&Th 9:50-11:10

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Office hours: Tuesday afternoons by appointment

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About this course:

Metaphysics is the study of the ultimate nature of reality. It addresses questions like the following. What are numbers? What is causation? What is time? What is it for one thing to be part of another? What is a law of nature? (Does $F=ma$ merely describe what objects happen to do, or does it somehow more actively govern their behavior?) What is going on when we say that two things are both red, that they are the same color—is there really some one thing, redness, that they both have? What is the difference between change and destruction? A bookcase continues to exist if you paint it blue, but presumably the *Mona Lisa* doesn't.

In this course, we will focus on questions about time, change, freedom, and possibility. We will start out by considering what kind of thing a person is, and what sorts of changes we can and cannot survive. (We survive minor physical changes like haircuts and skinned knees. But what about larger physical changes, or large psychological changes?) We will then address the question of change in general. Do objects change by in some sense *moving* through time, or by having different parts at different times, in the way they have different parts at different places? This will lead us to consider the nature of time itself. Does it make sense to say that it passes? Is the past and perhaps even the future just as real as the present? Is time travel possible? If it is, why can't I go back and kill my younger self? Next, we will turn to some related questions about the possibility of human freedom and choice. Finally, we will take a very brief look at possibility itself—in particular, the question of whether we should believe that there are other possible worlds.

Learning goals:

Departmental learning goals:

- develop the ability to critically evaluate ideas and arguments
- develop the ability to construct coherent arguments in support of one's views
- develop the ability to accurately and fairly present views that differ from one's own
- develop the ability to write clearly and in an organized manner

Additional learning goals:

- become comfortable grappling with complex, abstract material

Readings:

Available on Canvas.

Software:

Canvas: <https://rutgers.instructure.com/login/canvas>

Canvas is free for Rutgers students; login with your NetId. We will use it to access the readings and to turn in papers.

TopHat: www.tophat.com

TopHat will be used primarily as an in-class response system for quizzes, polls, attendance and the like, though we will likely also use it for at-home posts to discussion forums. You will be able to submit answers using Apple or Android smartphones and tablets, laptops, or through text message.

Top Hat requires a paid subscription of \$36 for the semester (this covers all your courses that use TopHat: it is not \$36 per course). An invitation will be sent to you by email. If you don't receive this email, you can register by simply visiting our course website: <https://app.tophat.com/e/775340/> or by searching by university and course join code. This course's join code is 775340. Visit the Top Hat Overview (<https://success.tophat.com/s/article/Student-Top-Hat-Overview-and-Getting-Started-Guide>), which outlines how you will register for a Top Hat account, as well as provides a brief overview to get you up and running on the system.

If you need help with Top Hat at any time, please contact their Support Team by way of email (support@tophat.com), the in-app support button, or calling 1-888-663-5491.

Evaluation:

- *Papers: 60%*

You will write three papers for this course. The first will be worth 10%, will only be about 2 pages long, and will be largely (though not entirely!) expository. The second and third will be 5 pages long, and worth 25% each. I will provide more details on these assignments later.

- *Quizzes: 25%*

We will have regular in-class quizzes, administered through Top Hat. These will take place on most Mondays, unless after a break or something, and occasionally on Thursdays to make up for those missed Mondays. I have marked a *tentative* quiz schedule with a 'q' before the dates in the below schedule of readings.

These quizzes will only take from 5-15 minutes. If you attend class, take notes, *and review your notes before class*, you will not find them particularly difficult. Also, everyone can miss one quiz with no penalty.

- *Class participation: 15%*

We will have a lot of classroom discussion, as well as a certain amount of discussion via TopHat. Sometimes I will ask questions for online discussion outside of class. Your overall participation grade will reflect the extent to which you are actively engaged in the course: contributions to in class and online discussion count, as well as visits during office hours and the like.

NOTE: between in-class quizzes and discussion, a full 40% of your grade will be settled by what happens in the classroom. If you want a class that you can skip a lot, this one is not for you.

Grading Policies

1. I readily grant extensions on papers, but you have to contact me a minimum of 24 hours in advance. If you do not make arrangements beforehand, late papers will be downgraded by 1/3 letter grade per day. (So a B+ paper one day late becomes a B, etc.)
2. To pass this class, you must complete all three writing assignments and take 75% of the quizzes. (This is a necessary condition on passing, not a sufficient one.)

Notes on Academic Integrity

1. Each student is required to adhere to Rutgers' Academic Integrity Policy:
<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers/>
It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with this policy, and what constitutes a violation of it. All work submitted must be your own, and all sources must be properly cited.
2. All papers will be submitted to Turnitin.com (via Sakai) for the detection of plagiarism. Further, all papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of Turnitin.com service is subject to the usage policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.
3. Students are not permitted to buy or sell any course materials, online or otherwise. This includes handouts, paper topics, homework questions, slides, etc. Such behavior constitutes academic misconduct.

Further Resources:

None of the below are mandatory, and none of your papers are research papers (more on what I expect later). These are just optional further readings to bolster your understanding. However, if you do consult these resources for papers, you must cite them.

- Useful print resources available in Alexander Library (those with an ‘*’ are also available online through the library):
 - * *A Companion to Metaphysics*, eds. Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa
 - * *Riddles of Existence*, Theodore Sider and Earl Conee
 - Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, Michael Loux
 - Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, eds. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman
 - Four Dimensionalism*, Theodore Sider
 - Metaphysics*, Peter van Inwagen
 - Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, eds. Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne, and Dean Zimmerman
- Useful online resources:
 - The two starred books above, available online through the Rutgers Library portal.
 - Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu>
 - Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://www.rep.routledge.com>

Tentative Schedule of Readings:

All material is available on Canvas. Bibliographic information is also posted to Canvas in the 'syllabus and bibliography' module.

0. Introduction

1/24 no reading assigned

I. The Persistence of Persons

1/28 Perry, excerpt from "The Problem of Personal Identity"
Kean, "The Audacious Plan to Save This Man's Life by Transplanting His Head"

1/31 no class

q2/4 Shoemaker, "Personal Identity: A Materialist Account"

2/7 Parfit, "Personal Identity"

q2/11 Swinburne, "Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory"

II. Persistence More Generally: How Does it Work, Anyway?

2/14 No assigned reading. *Optional: Chisholm, "Identity Through Time"*

q2/18 Paper #1 due

Quine, from "Identity, Ostension, and Hypostasis," §1 only.

Optional: the rest of the article

2/21 Thomson, §5 only of "Parthood and Identity Across Time". *Rest is optional*

Heller, "Temporal Parts of Four Dimensional Objects".

Optional: van Inwagen, "The Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts"

q2/25 continued

III. Time

2/28 no assigned reading.

Optional: McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time;" Broad, "McTaggart's Arguments Against the Reality of Time"

q3/4 Williams, "The Myth of Passage"

3/7 Hawley, "Metaphysics and Relativity," introduction and sections 1.1 and 1.2

3/11 Markosian, "How Fast Does Time Pass?"

Optional: Maudlin, "Remarks on the Passing of Time"

q3/14 Prior, "Some Free Thinking About Time"

Paul, "Temporal Experience"

3/18 no class (spring break)

3/21 no class (spring break)

IV. Issues Arising: Is Time Travel Possible?

3/25 Heinlein, "All You Zombies"

3/28 Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel"

q4/1 **Paper #2 due**

continued and catch-up

Optional: Ehring, "Personal Identity and Time Travel"

4/4 no class

V. Issues Arising: Freedom of the Will

- 4/8 Taylor, "Fatalism"
q4/11 continued
4/15 van Inwagen, "The Consequence Argument"
Optional: van Inwagen, "The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will"
q4/18 Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self"
4/22 Stace, "The Problem of Free Will"
Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"
q4/25 Dennett, "Possible Worlds,"
Lewis, "Are We Free to Break the Laws?"

VI. Possible Worlds

- 4/29 Lewis, "Possible Worlds"
Lewis, "A Philosopher's Paradise"
q5/2 Stalnaker, "Possible Worlds"
5/6 continued/catch-up

Paper #3 due May 13, 8 AM. No extensions—this is the final exam slot set by the registrar. If you want to receive comments on it, you should turn it in by May 9.